

Sunday Column – A Million Cats
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Collaboration is where it's at in animal welfare. If you care about animals you will be happy to know that truly amazing things are happening all over the U.S. and it is very much a result of our collaborative efforts.

A few weeks ago I wrote about the Best Friends Animal Society's vision of achieving a "No-Kill Nation" by 2025. Over 200 cities have joined the list of No-Kill communities and Columbus, GA is not far behind.

A new Georgia animal welfare coalition, of which PAWS Humane is a steering committee member, believes we can end the euthanasia of healthy, treatable dogs and cats even sooner in our state.

Another collaborative effort is the Million Cat Challenge which is an initiative to save one million cats over a five year period. When the movement began in January, 2014 this was considered a stretch goal. By the end of 2015, with over 300 member shelters, we were already 41% there. At this point the initiative is expected to easily exceed the goal by the end of 2018.

Participating in this initiative requires a certain amount of reporting responsibility but returns so much more. The Challenge website outlines five key initiatives.

The first of these is to provide alternatives to intake. Most owners don't really want to surrender their pets, but when they come into our shelter to do just that it is because they feel they have exhausted all options. Shelters can often provide medical and other interventions to help keep cats in their homes.

The second initiative is managed admissions. This means scheduling intakes for dates we expect to have space for them. Even when an owner is truly out of options he will usually want to ensure a positive outcome for his pet and will work with us in order to do that.

Thirdly, shelters can place a limit on the number of cats they can humanely care for. Every shelter has a capacity for humane care. This can be expanded by utilizing foster homes but even then, it is what it is. Each shelter needs to determine just what this is.

The fourth initiative is to remove barriers to adoption. This expands the pool of adopters and gives kitties a chance they might not otherwise have. We don't exclude potential adopters because of income, home ownership, or for other reasons that have nothing to do with whether they will provide a loving home.

The last initiative is to return to field after sterilizing and vaccinating un-owned cats. This can be controversial and we have to work with both sides of this issue to make it a livable option for everyone.

For over a century, the exponential increase in the cat population has flooded shelters with far more cats than they can humanely care for. Literally, hundreds of thousands of cats are euthanized in U.S. shelters every year. It doesn't have to be this way and the Million Cat Challenge is proof that relatively simple interventions can make a big difference.

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